

TEAR DUCT INFECTION OR BLOCKAGE

(Dacryocystitis or Dacryostenosis)



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

- Infection of the tear duct, sac or gland is called dacryocystitis. The germs that cause the infection can be spread to other people. Infection of the tear duct or sac occurs in all ages, but it is most common in children.
- Scarring, blockage or narrowing of the tear duct usually from inherited abnormality or prior infection is called dacryostenosis. Inherited blockage of the tear duct usually appears in infants at 3 to 12 weeks of age. Blockage caused by infection can occur at any age following an infection.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

The following symptoms may apply to either blockage or infection:

- Persistent tearing of one or both eyes.
- Drainage of mucus and pus instead of water from the tear duct. The drainage may flow spontaneously or with pressure on the area.
- Pain, redness or swelling beneath the eye suggesting infection.
- Redness and swelling of the tear duct.
- Redness of the white of the eye surrounding the tear duct.

CAUSES

Obstruction of the tear duct may result from the following:

- Inherited abnormality.
- Bacterial infection of the duct.
- Sinus or nasal infection, especially chronic nasal infection.
- Nasal polyps.
- Eye injury.
- Eye infection, including severe pinkeye (conjunctivitis).
- Fracture of the nose or facial bones.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Newborns and infants, especially those with a family history of blocked tear ducts.
- Recent infection, such as those listed above.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

Obtain prompt medical treatment for eye, nose or sinus infections.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- Infection is usually curable with antibiotics.
- Obstruction is usually curable with dilation of the duct or surgery. Allow 3 weeks for recovery.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Without treatment, an obstruction may cause chronic infection.
- Without treatment, infection may spread to the cornea and other parts of the eye or permanently scar the tear duct.



TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Often requires no treatment other than massage.
- Surgery to dilate and probe the tear duct canal. In infants, this usually requires a brief general anesthesia in an outpatient surgical facility. In adults, it is often done in the doctor's office with local anesthesia. After dilation, the tear duct system is irrigated with saline.
- For obstruction (if surgery is not necessary), massage the tear duct twice a day with fingertips to milk the contents.
- For infection, relieve pain by applying warm soaks.
- Complete obstruction may require a surgical opening from the eye into the nasal passage.

MEDICATIONS

Oral or topical antibiotics for infection.

ACTIVITY

Reduce activity during treatment for the infection. Avoid swimming and contact sports.

DIET

No special diet.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of a tear duct infection or blockage.
- Temperature of 101° F (38.3° C) or more.
- Symptoms don't improve, despite treatment.
- Vision is affected.